



**BRINGING THE WORLD TO YOUR CLASSROOM**



# Junior Scholastic

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SCHOLASTIC.COM/JUNIORSCHOLASTIC

**"This  
is my  
home"**

**AFGHANISTAN:  
Why We're  
There &  
Why It  
Matters  
to Her**

 **SCHOLASTIC**



**Whales at Risk • Civil Rights Play • Mapman Contest**

Afghanistan lies at the  
crossroads of central  
and south Asia.



# Inside Afghanistan

WILL A HUNGER FOR LEARNING IN THIS POOR AND WAR-TORN  
COUNTRY BE A KEY TO PEACE AND PROSPERITY?

## FAST FACTS

**AREA:** 251,772 sq mi  
(slightly smaller than Texas)

**POPULATION:** 28,400,000

**PER CAPITA GDP\*:** \$800

**RELIGIONS:** Sunni Muslim, 80%;  
Shia Muslim, 19%; other, 1%

**LANGUAGES:** Pashtu, Afghan  
Persian, Turkic, others

**LITERACY:** Males, 43%;  
females, 13%

**LIFE EXPECTANCY:** Males,  
44 years; females, 44 years

\*GDP stands for gross domestic product; per capita means per person. The amount is the value of all items produced in a country in a year, divided by the population. It often is used as a measure of a nation's wealth.

## Words to Know

- **civilian** (*n*): a person who is not in the armed forces or police.
- **mullah** (*n*): a title of respect for a community Islamic leader.
- **repressive** (*adj*): tending to put down dissent by force.
- **terrain** (*n*): natural physical features of an area of land.

What do you think of when you hear the word *Afghanistan*? Is it just a far-

away place where a war is being fought? For some U.S. kids it means more, because they have a parent or loved one serving there. For the girl on our cover, Afghanistan is her only reality.

She lives in a small village near Kabul (*KAH-bull*), the capital. The **terrain** you see behind her tells you a lot. Afghanistan is mountainous, with soil that is very dry. Only about 12 percent of the land can be farmed, and safe drinking water is scarce. More than half of the people are desperately poor. The United Nations' 2009 Human Development Report ranks Afghanistan 181st out of 182 countries.

## From War to Peace?

The U.S. and its allies have been at war in Afghanistan since October 2001. U.S. officials said then that the Taliban, Afghanistan's **repressive** ruling militia, was sheltering Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden had masterminded the

September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., which killed nearly 3,000 people.

U.S.-led forces didn't get bin Laden, but they did oust the Taliban from power. However, the Taliban has since retaken control of large parts of the country.

As the years passed and the death toll rose, Americans' support for the war faded. Yet President Barack Obama recently pledged 30,000 more U.S. troops to the fight.

Many Americans object to this commitment. Among their concerns: The U.S. military has been overstretched by two wars. Besides Afghanistan, U.S. troops have been fighting in Iraq since 2003.

The President says that the Taliban must be driven out because it would continue to support terrorists who want to kill Americans.

Troops alone cannot stop the Taliban. Obama wants to increase aid for Afghan **civilians** to provide services "that can make an immediate impact in [their] lives."

Greg Mortenson has another idea: "promoting peace with books, not bombs." To learn more, read on.

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**ABOVE:** The new book by Greg Mortenson, who is building schools in faraway places.  
**RIGHT:** No longer denied an education, these Afghan girls study at a high school in Bamiyan, Afghanistan.





WEB WATCH  
Pennies for Peace  
[ikat.org/media-and-press/videos](http://ikat.org/media-and-press/videos)



LEFT: Greg Mortenson with girls who attend one of the schools he helped build.

ABOVE: Afghan boys and girls enjoyed "Go Skateboarding Day" in Kabul last summer.

## A Startling Discovery

In 1993, American Greg Mortenson tried to climb K2, the world's second-highest mountain (see map, p. 13). His failed attempt started him on a remarkable journey.

Mortenson recovered from his expedition in a remote, poverty-stricken village in Pakistan. While there, he noticed the children's hunger to learn, and promised to build them a school. As described in the best-selling book *Three Cups of Tea*, he fulfilled that promise in 1996.

Since then, Mortenson has built 130 other schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the Taliban had tried to suppress learning, especially for girls. A girl caught studying in secret risked death.

Despite great odds, Afghan children still strive to learn. In the following passage from his new book, *Stones into Schools*, Mortenson describes a startling discovery that he made while in Afghanistan in 2004.

Waris was kind enough to offer Mullah Mohammed [one of my co-workers] and me a ride. . . . We were about an hour west of Baharak just outside the village of Simdara when I looked to my right and saw an old earthen hut 20 yards from

hut, I got out, walked over to the open door, and peered in. Sure enough, it was a toilet—or at least it had been at one time. The roof was now gone, and the four toilet pits had been covered by old boards. There were 25 children

**“[It was] quite noisy because nearly 100 students were packed in like sardines.”**

the side of the road that appeared to be filled with children. . . .

“Would you mind stopping?” I asked Waris. “I think there was a school back there.”

Waris and Mullah Mohammed both laughed. “No, Greg, that’s actually a public toilet,” explained Waris. . . . He kept driving.

“That might be true, Waris, but it seemed to be full of kids. What were they doing there? We need to go back and find out.”

. . . When we got back to the

between 4 and 5 years old, plus one teacher, and a slate board leaning against the wall.

The students were quite happy to chat with Waris, Mullah Mohammed, and me about their class and their curriculum. After about 10 minutes, the teacher . . . asked if we might like to see “the rest of the school.” . . . We nodded and followed her up the hill.

Just over the crest, at a spot that was invisible from the road, were a pair of tattered . . . refugee tents.

BELOW: U.S. soldiers on patrol near Afghanistan's Tangi Valley.

21<sup>st</sup> Century Governments in Action

## Afghanistan Is a Transitional Democracy.

Afghanistan's government underwent a major change after the Taliban was ousted in 2001. The current form of government was established by a new constitution, adopted in January 2004. The country held its first democratic election that October.

**THE PRESIDENT**, who heads the executive branch, is both head of government and chief of state. The President is elected by the people to a five-year term, and is limited to two terms. The country has two Vice Presidents, also elected to five-year terms.

**THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY** is the legislative (lawmaking) branch. It has two chambers. The *Wolesi Jirga* (*JUR-guh*), which means House of the People, has 249 members. They are elected by the people to five-year terms. The *Meshrano Jirga* (House of the Elders) has 102 members. One third of the members are chosen by the President, one third by district councils, and one third by provincial councils. Under special circumstances, the government can assemble a *Loya Jirga* (Grand Council) to amend the constitution and decide other weighty matters.

**THE SHERA MAHKAMA** (Supreme Court) heads the judicial branch. The President appoints its nine members, who must be approved by the *Wolesi Jirga*, for 10-year terms.

FOR COMPARISON, SEE THE U.S. GOVERNMENT PROFILE AT [scholastic.com/js/ourgovt](http://scholastic.com/js/ourgovt).

each of which featured a single chalkboard and at least 30 children, all of whom were sitting on the ground. These students were a little older, second- and third-graders. . . . After a few minutes of chatting, one of the two teachers turned to me and asked, "Do you want to see our upper school?"

"By all means—please lead the way."

Down the other side of the hill was a structure that appeared to be an old toolshed. . . . It was slightly larger than the toilet—perhaps 10 feet wide by 18 feet long—and very dark inside. It was also quite noisy because nearly 100 students were packed in like sardines. These were the fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-graders, and according to the two women who were teaching them, they were doing extremely well—although it might have been helpful to have some books, some paper, and some pencils.

This was my introduction to the education system serving the region of Simdara, an area with a popula-

tion of roughly 4,000 people. . . . The students had neither books nor school supplies nor uniforms, and the teachers had not been paid in more than two years. . . .

We were forced to get back on the road and catch our plane . . . [but I later called the local education office]. The officials . . . said they had never even heard of the Simdara school district—but they would be delighted if we would consider putting in a proper school for the valley.

Reprinted by arrangement with Viking, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc., from *Stones into Schools*, © Greg Mortenson, 2009.

### Think About It

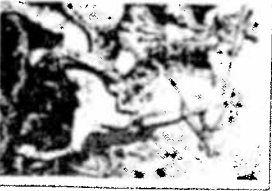
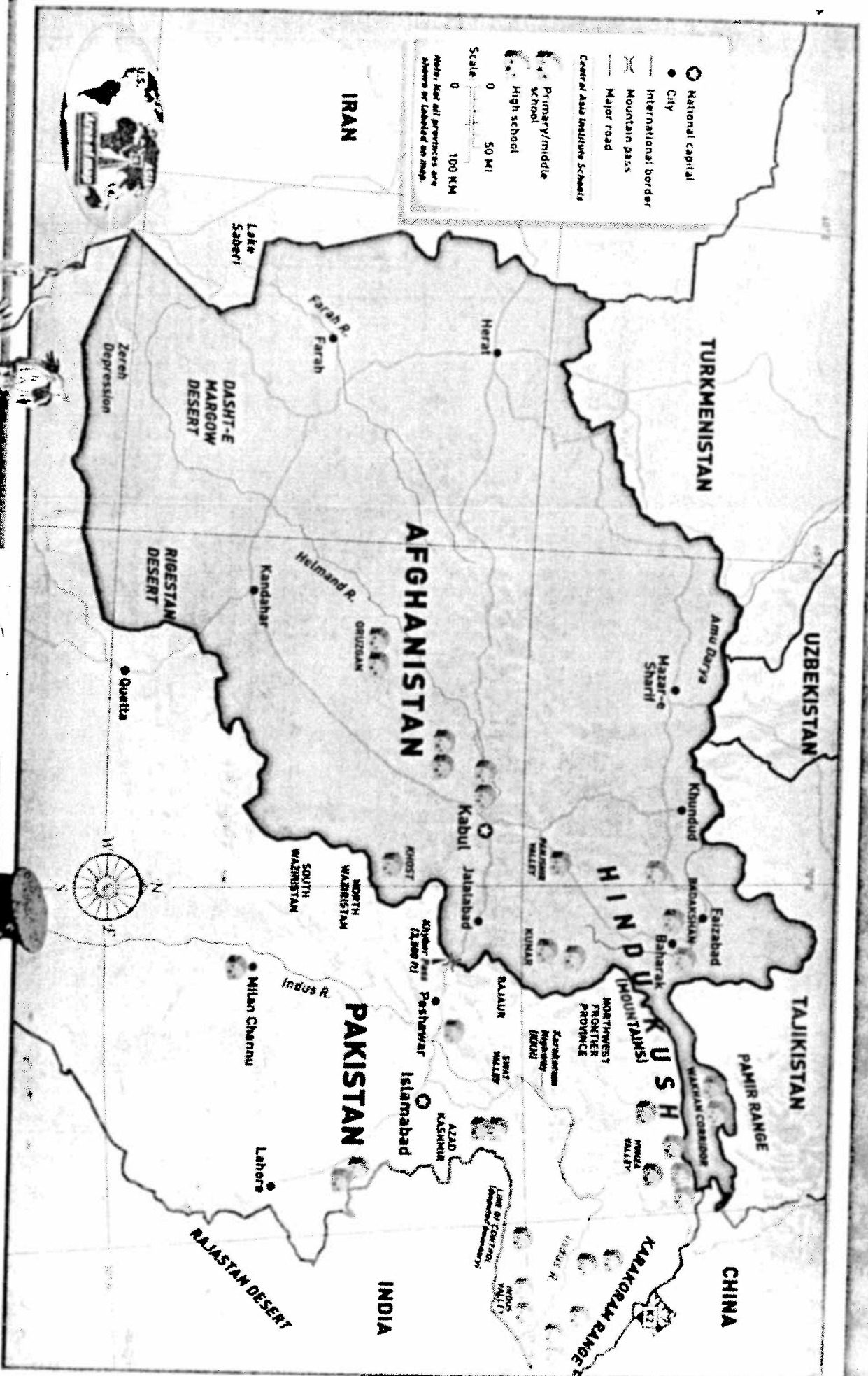
1. How did Mortenson react to his discovery? What might you have said or done in the same situation?
2. Why do you suppose these teachers and students were so dedicated to learning?

# Inside Afghanistan

1. Define the following:
  - a. Terrain:
  - b. Repressive:
  - c. Civilians:
  - d. Mullah:
2. How much of Afghanistan can be farmed?
3. In 2009, where did the United Nations Human Development report rank Afghanistan?
4. Who was the United States trying to remove from power in Afghanistan? Why?
5. How many more troops did President Obama promise to send to Afghanistan?
6. When Greg Mortenson and his group stopped to see the Afghan kindergarten for 4 and 5 year olds, what kind of building was it located in? How many children were in that kindergarten?
7. In what kind of building did the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders attend school? How many 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders were there?
8. What kind of building was the “upper school” located in? How big was it? How many students were in that building?
9. According to the teachers of the upper school, it might be helpful if their students had what?
10. How long had it been since the teachers had been paid?

## **Inside Afghanistan**

11. Our country is divided on whether or not our military should currently be in Afghanistan. Do you think our military should currently be in Afghanistan? Why or why not?
12. Our country is divided on whether or not we should currently be giving aid to Afghanistan. Do you think we should currently be giving aid to Afghanistan? Why or why not?
13. The article states that “troops alone cannot stop the Taliban”. President Obama wants to increase aid to provide services for civilians that “can make an immediate impact in their lives.” What kind of services do you think would help make an immediate impact?



**CONQUEROR OF THE YEAR**  
1221 A.D.: The Mongol warrior Genghis Khan (JENG-GIS KAHN) wraps up a bloody conquest of Afghanistan. After he dies in 1227, one foreign power after another takes



INT: THE GRANGER COLLECTION, STAPLETON COLLECTION/CORBIS. ER COLLECTION, PATRICK ROBERT/CORBIS SYGMA, LANCE CPL. SCHWITZ/ U.S. MARINES, MAP: JIM McCAHON/NAFMAN

**BRITISH SUNSET**  
1842: Afghans force out the occupying army of the British Empire. Nearly 16,500 British soldiers and their civilian



**EXIT, A SUPERPOWER**  
1989: After a decade of occupation, armies of the Soviet Union (left) are driven out by mujahadeen (moo-jah-DEEN) guerrillas.

**AN ENDLESS WAR?**  
2001: U.S.-led troops oust the Taliban. Afghanistan's harsh Islamic rulers. More than eight years later, the fight against extremist forces is still



## Afghanistan Map Questions

1. What is the capital of Afghanistan?
2. What is the capital of Pakistan?
3. What mountain chain straddles the northern border between Afghanistan and Pakistan?
4. How many total schools (primary, middle, and high schools) are there in Afghanistan? How about Pakistan?
5. Name the Afghan cities located above 35° N latitude.
6. What countries border Afghanistan to the North?
7. What countries border Afghanistan to the East?
8. What countries border Afghanistan to the South?
9. What countries border Afghanistan to the West?
10. How many major rivers are in Afghanistan? What are their names?
11. What 2 deserts were located in southern Afghanistan?